

Britton-Cubberly House
New Dorp, Staten Island
(1677-1695) New York
Richmond Co

HABS No. NY-4-5

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL & DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New York

Historic American Buildings Survey (Fed.)
Wakefield Worcester, District Officer
Washington Depot, Connecticut.

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THE BRITTON-CUBBERLY HOUSE
New Dorp, Staten Island, N.Y.

Location, Date and History

This old stone cottage, now owned by the Staten Island Association of Arts and Sciences, and used for their headquarters and museum, is a fine example of Colonial Architecture, retaining, possibly, nearly all of its original construction throughout.

It stands at the foot of New Dorp Lane, at the corner of Cedar Grove Avenue, near New Dorp Beach. The land is part of the original "Governor's Lot" of about 96 acres, granted by royal patent to Obadiah Holmes which Governor Edmund Andros signed on September 29, 1677. The complete chain of title from that day to the present is published in

Proceedings of the Staten Island Association of Arts AND Sciences, Vol. V, pp68-74, pub. 1916, with half-tone reproductions of a water-color sketch and photographs dated respectively 1848-50, 1900, 1903 and 1915.

It was deeded by Holmes and his wife, October 28, 1695, to Nathaniel Britton; and by Britton and his wife Elizabeth, April 9, 1714, to Thomas Walton; and by Walton's son, Thomas, in 1761 to Isaac Cubberly. It remained in the Cubberly family for 86 years, until David J. Tyson acquired it on June 26, 1847. From this long tenure in one family the Cubberly name is still associated with the property.

Tyson immediately deeded to Harriet Lord (subsequently Harriet Lord Britton) from whom a part, including the house, passed to her son, Dr. Nathaniel Lord Britton,

the botanist (a trustee of the Staten Is. Assn. of Arts and Sciences). In 1915, Dr. Britton and his wife, Elizabeth, made a gift of the cottage and the piece of land on which it stands (about half an acre), free of all incumbrances, to the Association, for its corporate purposes, with the single stipulation that the cottage be preserved by the "Institute" (as the Association is generally called) as a specimen of old Colonial Architecture, and that its structural characteristics would be maintained.

In his letter tendering the gift, which he described, he said: "This cottage was apparently built at three different times, by additions to the original structure, and modifications of it; the low southern end is apparently the oldest, and the northern part, against New Dorp Lane, is doubtless the newest. Some of the stone portions of the southern and middle parts may date from the ownership of the property by Nathaniel Britton and his wife Elizabeth prior to 1714."

It will be observed that, as a result of either clever design or remarkable coincidence, Dr. Nathaniel Britton and his wife ^{ELIZABETH} signed their letter of gift in December, 1914, exactly 200 years after the first Nathaniel and Elizabeth Britton gave up their title in 1714.

Architectural Description

The condition of the building is fairly good throughout. As shown in the drawings of the main section of the house, which is south of the stair-hall, the walls are

built of field-stone to the height of the eaves with clapboard above. The portion north of the stair-hall (this portion having been excavated for a walled cellar) is of frame construction above ground, and shingled.

The eastern wall of the kitchen wing is of frame construction, clapboarded.

Other walls are stone to the height of the eaves and clapboards above.

In the window of bedroom No. 2, (shown on drawings) the upper sash is probably the original, of crude design with heavy muntins divided into 12 small lights. The other is probably much later.

The dormers to the east, and a skylight in the west, part of the roof were added at a later date -- no one knows when. The cornices have been detailed in the drawings and show their extreme simplicity. There are no mouldings.

The chimneys are brick; the roof shingled. The main door in the west elevation is the original "Dutch Door."

The interior of the first floor consists of five rooms, and a wood-shed formed by the low roof at the southwest corner of the building. In the so-called dining-room is a batten door entering from the hall (detailed on drawing No. 9) which is probably the original. There is also an interesting brick fireplace in this room with the original wood mantel, also shown on the drawings.

In the kitchen is an enormous brick fire-place with an oven (see details). The breasts are exposed brick, with

wood lintel over the fire-place opening.

All rooms have exposed-beamed ceilings, with plaster walls and wood floors. At some recent date, the second floor has been partitioned off to form four bedrooms and one bathroom.

A ladder in the kitchen gives the only access to the room above it, probably used as a servant's room.

The building retains its original charm of simplicity, unornamented in any way.

Rooms have been furnished appropriately by the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the house has a caretaker in charge.

(From field-notes of Felix Bowen, architect, New York City, in connection with the present survey.)

Written, May 10, 1934, by

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Reviewed 1936 by H.C. Foreman